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Sumner cheers interchange

ANGIE LEVENTIS; The News Tribune

Three heavy trucks plowed through a strip of yellow construction tape on a new section of highway in Sumner on Thursday, drawing applause and perhaps sighs of relief from a crowd of residents and state and city officials.

The trucks were the first vehicles to cross the new north Sumner interchange, a \$15 million route connecting Highway 167 to the growing industrial area in the city's north end.

It's about time, local officials say.

"We've been waiting for this since the 1970s," said Mayor Barbara Skinner. "And now we finally get to drive on it."

The trio of trucks provided an appropriate ribbon-cutting ceremony: The new freeway interchange at 24th Street East and Highway 167 will reroute trucks that once had to travel through Sumner's downtown to get to the industrial area, giving them easier access to the freeway.

City officials estimate around 2,000 trucks drove through downtown Sumner every day. There are more than 65 industrial buildings in the north end, and city officials hope the interchange will bring more developers to the area at the same time it clears congestion downtown.

As the three trucks rolled through the interchange, the Sumner High School Jazz Ensemble provided music in the opposite lanes. Drummers Dan Ojala, 15, and Adam Johnson, 17, said they enjoyed their freeway gig, especially considering the close encounters they've had with trucks on the city's streets.

"This one just literally about clipped me at a stop sign once," Ojala said. "They don't ever slow down."

Bryan Stowe runs a construction company about a mile from the interchange. He believes the route will help him entice clients who once shied away from the area because of transportation constraints.

"Everybody wants to be close to the freeway and get on and off as quick as possible," he said. "Time is money."

The interchange connects to 142nd Avenue East, a five-lane road and bridge across the Stuck (White) River the city built for \$10 million in 2000.

Sumner officials had feared that all the money and infrastructure would go to waste as funding shortages and environmental impact concerns delayed work on the interchange until June 2003.

State Transportation Department officials began designing the project in the early 1990s and construction was to begin in 1998. But the state had to fill some wetlands and wait for permits from the National Marine Fisheries Service, which was concerned with protecting fish in a nearby stream.

Mayor Skinner said the interchange was proposed when the Highway 167 freeway was built in the late 1960s, but the state ran out of money and eliminated that part of the project. Sumner and state officials have been talking about building the interchange ever since, she said.

"There were some days when I thought, 'This isn't going to happen,'" said City Administrator Andrew Neiditz. "This has been a long-awaited moment in Sumner."

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Couplet may hit funding problem

Consultants say traffic may not justify extension project

Megan Cooley

Staff writer

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Streets can have "S" curves and "U" turns, but it's a "T" in one Spokane Valley road that has added to an ongoing controversy during the last four years.

Appleway Boulevard, the southern leg of the Sprague-Appleway couplet, ends at University Road where drivers must turn either left or right. Straight ahead, drivers can see an unused right of way.

Some citizens praise the couplet for easing traffic congestion through Spokane Valley. They want the city to extend Appleway two miles east, turning that "T" into a through road.

Some blame the two one-way roads for the demise of several stores that line them, and they don't want to subject business owners east of University to the same drop in traffic others have suffered.

But as the debate has raged, one question has attracted little attention: Would the couplet extension be eligible for state funds needed to build it?

Consultants told the Spokane Valley City Council last week that if it doesn't transform Sprague from a sprawling retail corridor to a destination that attracts more shoppers, the city probably couldn't sell the extension project to the state. There might not be enough traffic now for the state to justify spending the money

"You will have to rejustify the couplet based on purpose and function, based on congestion," said Terry Moore, of ECONorthwest, a consultant hired by the city to study the economics of the couplet. "If you don't change the land use in the area, we don't think you'll be able to justify the need."

For the project to be considered for state money, the Spokane Regional Transportation Council (SRTC) must put it on what's called the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP).

"The reason the Valley Corridor Project has not been included in the MTP to date remains the same today as it was in 1998," SRTC Transportation Manager Glenn Miles wrote in an Aug. 12 letter obtained by The Spokesman-Review through a public records request. "There was a lack of sufficient analysis to demonstrate a purpose and need for the project."

The state has \$4.2 million set aside for the work, but that money might never reach Spokane Valley.

"Until such time as the purpose and need has been established and quantified, we're not in the position to justify putting (the extension project) into the Metropolitan Transportation Plan," he said.



Foot traffic is the only traffic east of University Road where the proposed extension of the Sprague-Appleway couplet is under fire. (Brian Plonka/The Spokesman-Review)

Spokane County originally intended for the couplet to reach Barker Road in the east, county engineer Ross Kelley said. The state granted only enough money to go to Pines Road, but the Pines-Sprague intersection was too overloaded to handle the couplet's abrupt ending. University could, so when the couplet was built in 2000, it stopped there.

But much has happened since then.

Spokane Valley incorporated, putting the roadway in the new city's hands.

Other east-west routes, such as Interstate 90 and 16th and 32nd avenues, have been or are being improved, possibly reducing the dependence on the couplet.

And Sullivan Road, a north-south street that has easy access from I-90, has evolved into a thriving retail corridor.

The city can't rely on the old studies – or a simple desire – to justify extending the couplet, Miles said. It has to complete an environmental assessment and new traffic modeling, work that's under way now.

In July, the county counted almost 22,400 eastbound vehicles at the Appleway-Thierman intersection and about 23,300 westbound vehicles at the Sprague-Thierman intersection, Kelley said. Combined, that's almost 12,000 more vehicles than traveled east and west at the Sprague-Thierman intersection in the late 1990s.

But the traffic counts drop farther east along the corridor, Kelley said. At the Sprague-Pines intersection, the county counted 29,400 vehicles in July, up only about 500 over the late 1990s.

The Washington state Transportation Improvement Board is the body that would allocate the \$4.2 million, if SRTC gives the project its nod. If the extension is rejected, the city could change the scope of its work and ask the board to OK that instead, but any new plan still would need to accomplish the couplet's original goals.

If the city decides to abandon the work, it will lose the money.

The possibility that the couplet could continue as an unfinished roadway baffles Jerry Quinn. He's part of a business group that has placed signs in Spokane Valley – one quite visibly at the "T" near University City Shopping Center – that read "Finish the Job."

"If the state decides that I-90 is more important than the Appleway couplet, I've got to question what the purpose of the couplet was in the first place since it ends so disastrously at U-City," Quinn said.

Quinn said companies have spent money positioning their buildings to face customers on the couplet. More business owners, including landowners along the unused right of way who could benefit from the extension, are awaiting a decision, he said.

"It was obviously intended to go beyond where it ends," Quinn said. "There are piles of dirt and Jersey barriers that imply that it will go beyond there."

THE WENATCHEE WORLD *online*

Paving the way: End in sight for Maple Street road work



Paving on Maple Street in Wenatchee means major reconstruction work on the road is nearing an end. Project manager Jim Bartleson said paving should be done by next Wednesday. The \$1.9 million project should wrap up completely by early November, Bartleson said. The road has been widened in areas and sidewalks have been added to both sides of Maple Street. (World photo/Kelly Gillin.)

By Marco Martinez, World staff writer
Friday - October 15, 2004

WENATCHEE — Maple Street's pothole past is about to become a memory as the paving portion of a \$1.9 million reconstruction project is expected to wrap up by the end of Wednesday.

The project, which covered Maple Street between Western and Wenatchee avenues, included:

- u Widening the road to 44 feet from curb to curb to add bike lanes on both sides of the street and a two-way left-turn lane.
- u Adding sidewalks so there are sidewalks on both sides of the street from Western Avenue to Miller Street;
- u Installing storm drain, new lighting and a new irrigation line, as well as relocating existing utilities.

Work on the project began last spring and should wrap up completely by early November, said James Bartleson, project manager with Hammond Collier Wade Livingstone, the engineering firm hired by the city to design the improvements.

Sections of Maple Street were as narrow as 24 feet before the project, said city engineer Don McGahuey.

The wider street and added sidewalks should make it safer for pedestrians, including students who attend Foothills Middle School, he said.

Bartleson said heavy traffic generated by the school, the Wenatchee Valley Senior Center, Cashmere Valley Bank and the ShopKo parking lot entrances has been a big challenge.

"This has been a heavily coordinated job with all the traffic, but I think it's gone about as well as it could have," he said.

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Phase 1 of Finley intertie to open with ceremony

Interstate 82, Olympia Street in Kennewick now linked

By Cara Fitzpatrick
Herald staff writer

Four decades after its conception, the first three-mile stretch of a \$13 million road project that will connect two Mid-Columbia highways is complete and the second phase is ready for construction.

A dual ribbon-cutting and groundbreaking ceremony is planned at 4 p.m. today, east of the intersection of Olympia Street and the new County Road 397.

Motorists can begin using the road between Interstate 82 and Olympia Street in Kennewick after the ceremony.

Ross Dunfee, Benton County's public works director, said the size and scope of the project has not been seen in the Mid-Columbia since the construction of I-82.

First identified in the county comprehensive plan in 1966, the intertie project will link Highway 397 in Finley with I-82, crossing Zintel Canyon and passing through the lower portion of the Horse Heaven Hills southwest of Finley.

The road's course will cut through about 10½ miles of farmland and sagebrush, moving about three million cubic yards — about the equivalent of 250,000 dump trucks — of dirt, rock and other materials in the process.

Officials say the intertie will provide a second route to town for Finley's residents, improve emergency response to rural areas and create a more direct path for trucks traveling to and from Finley's 1,000-acre industrial area.

"It's an important project for access and safety," Dunfee said.

The now-complete first phase links Interstate 82 with Olympia Street in Kennewick. It cost about \$2.5 million. About 650,000 cubic yards, or about 55,000 dump trucks of materials, had to be moved out of the way of the incoming road.

"It's very hilly terrain out there," Dunfee said. "We were taking the tops of the hills off and putting them into the valleys."

The base of the largest area to be filled was about two city blocks wide, he said.

Construction on phase two is set to start soon after the groundbreaking today and will continue the course of the road five miles from Olympia Street to Finley Road.

The second phase is expected to cost \$7 million and require about 2 million cubic yards, or about 170,000 dump trucks of material, to be moved.

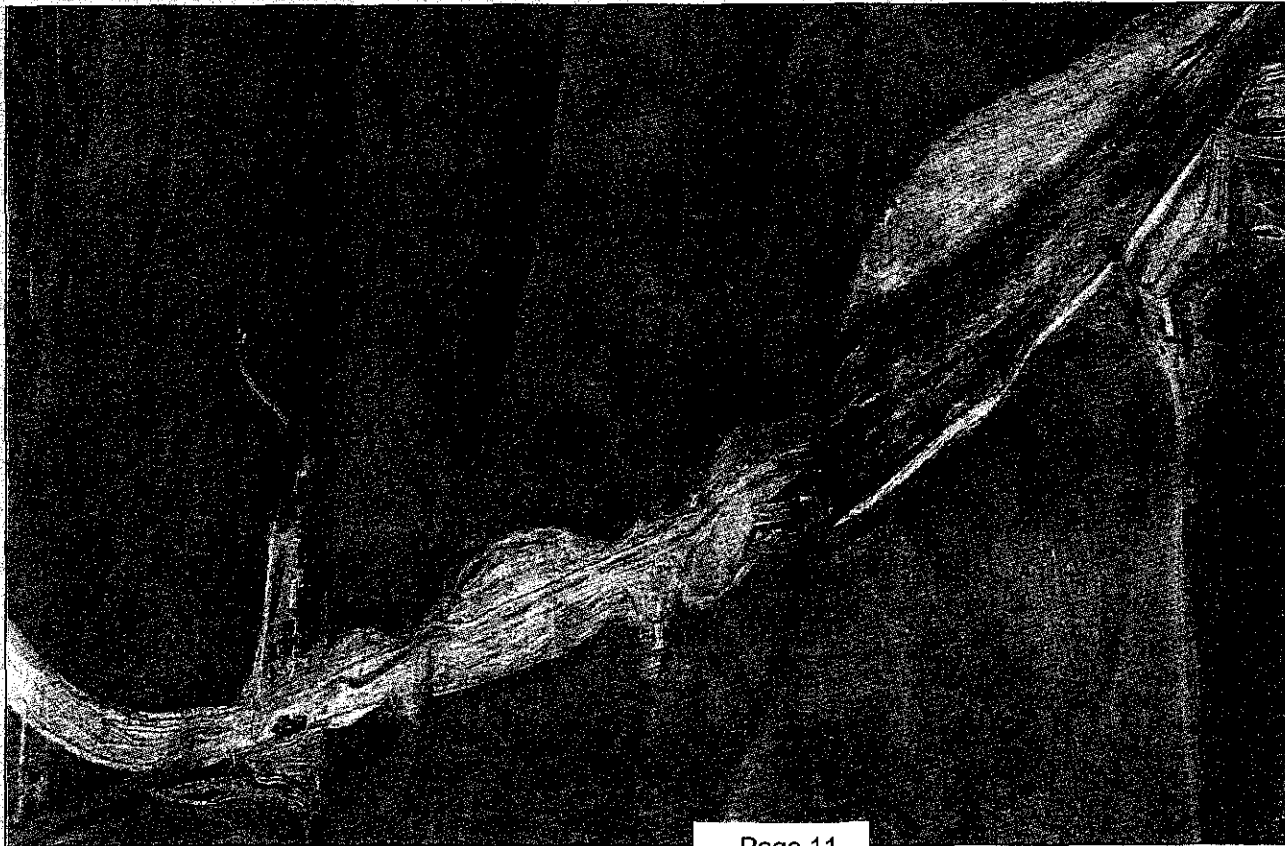
Completion of the second phase is tentatively expected in October 2005.

Phase three will reconstruct two miles of Finley and Riek roads and a half-mile of Pierr Road and connect to Highway 397. It will cost about \$3.5 million and move about 350,000 cubic yards of material, or about 30,000 dump trucks. A bridge also will be built over a stretch of railroad tracks near the intersection of Riek and Pierr roads.

Completion of the final phase is anticipated by the end of 2006.

Funding for the massive project has come from the state Department of Transportation, the Transportation Improvement Board, the city of Kennewick, Benton County, the Port of Kennewick and the state Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development.

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Herald file
The dirt outline of a roadway is visible in an aerial photo taken April 26 as construction crews work on cutting a three-mile swath through a stretch of farmland for the Finley intertie project. The first phase of the \$13 million project is now complete.

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